



## **Gendered Incentives for Legislative Compromise**

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## Abstract

The public often views legislative compromise as preferable to gridlock. As a result, legislators may face electoral incentives to engage in compromise. Conventional wisdom suggests that incentives to compromise will be especially strong for female legislators, who may be punished more than male legislators for failing to compromise. The researchers argue and show that contrary to conventional wisdom the role of legislator gender is limited. Although gender can affect evaluations of legislators who fail to compromise, the way people respond to female legislators who do not compromise depends on two factors: first, whether these legislators are co-partisans or members of the opposing party, and second, whether the compromise is about a “women’s issue.” The researchers’ results rest on two original national experiments and suggest that although female legislators may face stronger incentives to compromise under some conditions, under other conditions male legislators have greater incentives to engage in compromise.

In American politics legislative compromise is often seen as both a necessary step for government to address pressing policy problems (Adler and Wilkerson 2013; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, 2002) and a normatively desirable feature of policymaking (Gutmann and Thompson 2012; Mann and Ornstein 2012). Scholars suggest that “... governing a democracy without compromise is impossible” (Gutmann and Thompson 2012, 2), and public opinion surveys routinely find large majorities in support of bipartisanship and compromise.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, a wide range of both observational and experimental literature suggests that bipartisanship can improve public evaluations of Congress as a whole and of Congress members individually (Ramirez 2009; Harbridge et al. 2014; Carson et al. 2010).

This growing body of work on the value of political compromise points to a critical insight: not all legislators face the same incentives from the public to support legislative compromises. While the public evaluates some legislators who refuse to compromise harshly, they may be more forgiving of other legislators who stand firm. In this manuscript, we examine how legislator characteristics affect public evaluations of legislators who compromise versus those who refuse to compromise, producing different incentives for compromise while in office. We argue and show that these differences in incentives are systematic and vary with legislators’ gender, partisanship, and the type of issue at hand.

While numerous legislative characteristics can shape public responses to compromise, we focus on a characteristic that recent political outcomes have suggested to be particularly critical: politician gender. Research shows that not only are women more risk averse in running for office (Kanthak and Woon Forthcoming), but once in office women seek to overcome gender-based hurdles to differentiate themselves (Pearson and Dancey 2011b), and are more likely to

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example Pew (2012).

build cross-party coalitions than their male counterparts (Volden et al. 2013; Carey et al. 1998). Not only is legislator gender an important characteristic for understanding the behavior of politicians, it may also be important in the evaluations of elected officials by the public (Mo 2014). One reason we might observe greater cross-party cooperation from female legislators is that they may fear electoral punishment for not compromising. Gender stereotypes that characterize women as more compromising than men (Fox and Oxley 2003) provide one rationale for this connection, opening the possibility that women who do not conform to this pattern will be punished. As testament to this stereotype, the increasing number of women in Congress has led many journalists, political commentators and even legislators themselves to suggest that more women in Congress will lead to more legislative compromises (e.g., Cowan 2013). Taken together, these arguments suggest that people may hold female and male legislators to different standards for compromise.

In this manuscript, we reconsider the extent to which gender affects evaluations of legislators who do and do not compromise. We theorize and show that contrary to conventional wisdom, the effect of legislator gender on evaluations of compromise is highly conditional. In particular, we emphasize that the effect of gender cannot be understood without also accounting for legislator partisanship and the policy issue at stake. Partisanship provides a cushion, as people judge co-partisan legislators less harshly than the opposing party's legislators (even when they engage in the same type of behavior). But the degree of co-partisan cushion can vary between male and female legislators. Additionally, people may be more forgiving when female legislators do not compromise on "women's issues." In fact, it is male legislators who are disproportionately punished for refusing to compromise on "women's issues." Our results suggest that although gender does alter public evaluations, and thus the incentives for

compromise, the effect of gender is more limited than media predictions and previous research may suggest.

This argument holds clear implications for research on the role of gender in the political process. Conventional wisdom from media coverage, legislator behavior, and gender stereotypes argues that female legislators will be more compromising than their male counterparts. These arguments suggest that female legislators will, in turn, face stronger incentives to compromise. We argue that this is not always the case. Even more broadly, however, our work clarifies the way legislative compromise affects public perceptions of elected officials. Understanding which legislators have electoral incentives to engage in particular legislative behaviors – in this case, compromise – can be improved by evaluating public responses to elected officials in ways that capture important attributes of legislators and do not simply ask whether the public wants members of Congress to compromise (as do many public opinion polls).

We make our case as follows. First, we review background literature on public expectations for compromise and the role of gender in these expectations. Second, we consider when and why the role of gender may differ across partisanship and issue area. Next, we present the results of two national experiments. These studies allow us to consider the role of gender while accounting for the role of party and issue.

## **Background and Theory**

The extent to which legislators will or will not compromise can hinge on the incentives they face. Some of these incentives stem from pressures within the institution (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005; Harbridge 2015; Lebo et al. 2007; Lee 2009), while other incentives are external. Outside of the institution, one important factor incentivizing legislative behavior is members' electoral interests (e.g., Erikson and Wright 1980; Mayhew 1974). That is, legislators

who benefit electorally from compromise and are punished for not compromising may have the strongest incentives to pursue points of bipartisan agreement in Congress. Existing research suggests that these external incentives may stem from public preferences for compromise. In general, the public holds Congress in relatively low regard, and scholars have suggested that this reflects disappointment in the processes of governing (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, 2002, 2001). Public evaluations of Congress suffer further when the institution produces a partisan legislative record (Ramirez 2009, 2013; Harbridge and Malhotra 2011). These findings suggest that, overall, legislators may be more likely to earn favor with the public when they compromise.<sup>3</sup>

It is unlikely, however, that the public will equally reward all legislators who compromise or equally punish all legislators who fail to compromise. People may readily punish legislators with certain types of characteristics when they do not compromise, but may be much more forgiving when legislators with other characteristics do not compromise. Most obviously, for example, people's responses to a legislator's willingness to compromise may depend on the extent to which a legislator's partisanship aligns with his or her constituents (Carson et al. 2010; Harbridge 2015), but other characteristics of legislators may also matter. Ultimately, if public responses create an incentive for compromise, this means that some legislators may have more of an incentive than others.

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<sup>3</sup> Although primary electorates may act as a centrifugal force (Burden 2004; Brady et al. 2007), providing incentives for legislators to shy away from compromise, general electorates may be more predisposed to favor legislators who support bipartisan compromises (Carson et al. 2010).

While different legislator characteristics can affect how people evaluate a legislator's willingness to compromise, the characteristic we focus on is legislator gender.<sup>4</sup> We focus on gender because media coverage, legislator statements and existing scholarship all point to the idea that female legislators are more willing to engage in legislative compromise than their male counterparts. In turn, these expectations may lead constituents to be more critical of female legislators who do not compromise than male legislators who do not compromise. If this is the case, then female legislators may face stronger incentives to engage in compromise.

In the next section we first consider why female legislators might face greater incentives to compromise. Following this discussion, we emphasize the conditional nature of these incentives. Under some conditions, people may evaluate female legislators more harshly for not compromising, but under other conditions they may actually evaluate *male* legislators more harshly for failing to compromise.

### ***Gender and Compromise***

Recent elections have brought more and more female legislators to Congress. In numerous post-election interviews these female legislators expressed a variety of different issue positions and arguments, but one point has held constant: women, these legislators argued, would be more likely to compromise than male legislators.<sup>5</sup> One news report, for example, argued that

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, gender is not the only characteristic that affects public evaluations or elicits stereotypes; class (Carnes and Sadin Forthcoming), race (Haynie 2002) and other factors can be important as well.

<sup>5</sup> For example, in a January 3, 2013 interview with Dianne Sawyer, New York Democrat Kristen Gillibrand noted “Mr. President, if you want to see bipartisanship in Washington, invite the women Senators, we’ll help you get it done.”

“if the new U.S. Congress that convened on Thursday turns out to be less confrontational, more willing to reach reasoned, bipartisan compromise, less ... well ... on steroids, there could be a reason. A record number of women were sworn in as members of the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress as a result of elections last November 6” (Cowan 2013).

Media coverage aside, research on gender stereotypes does suggest that people often expect women to be more likely to compromise than their male counterparts (Fox and Oxley 2003; Alexander and Anderson 1993). Indeed, scholars have shown evidence of gender differences in the behavior of legislators, often in ways that align with these stereotypes. Female legislators engage in different rhetorical strategies on the House floor (Pearson and Dancey 2011a), are less ideologically extreme (Frederick 2010), differ in leadership styles (Vinkenburg et al. 2011), and, perhaps most importantly, are more likely to engage in consensus building (Volden et al. 2013). One rationale for this compromising behavior is that female legislator compromise to limit the negative consequences for breaking with these expectations—female legislators may expect more punishment for not compromising than their male counterparts.

This logic, then, suggests that female legislators may face greater costs for not compromising, which could, in turn, provide female legislators with greater electoral incentives to compromise than their male counterparts. Although, as previous research suggests, voters *generally* prefer elected officials who will compromise (Wolack 2013; Paris 2014), their dissatisfaction with a lack of compromise may be exacerbated by legislator gender. An observable implication of gender stereotypes and the conventional wisdom that women will be more compromising – and one that we consider later on in this manuscript – may be legislator

evaluations.<sup>6</sup> People will generally evaluate legislators who do not compromise more negatively than those who compromise, but the decline in evaluations due to non-compromise may be greater for women.<sup>7</sup>

### *Conditional Role of Gender*

The idea that gender may affect the way people evaluate legislators who do or do not compromise is consistent with both media coverage of female legislators and existing literature on gender stereotypes. It is questionable and even unlikely, however, that effect of gender is constant across all types of political contexts. Recent research on the political effect of gender stereotypes, for example, shows that individuals may not always use gender stereotypes to judge female politicians (Bauer forthcoming; Brooks 2011). Rather, scholars have suggested that other political factors may overwhelm the effect of a legislator's gender (Dolan 2014a; Dolan 2014b; Hayes 2011). Next, we consider two factors that existing research suggests may play the greatest role in conditioning the effect of gender: legislator party and the type of issue under consideration. We discuss the role of each factor below.

### *Role of Party*

Research often suggests that partisanship is a social identity (Green et al. 2002; Klar 2014). In turn, these social identities drive negative affective orientations towards members of

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<sup>6</sup> For work on the role of stereotypes as a psychological mechanism underlying evaluations of counter-stereotypic female lawmakers see Krupnikov and Bauer (2014); Brooks (2011).

<sup>7</sup> One reason we might expect people to respond more negatively to female legislators who do not compromise compared to male legislators who do not compromise is that sometimes people's reliance on gender stereotypes is so strong that they react negatively when individuals go against gender-based expectations (Hitchon and Chang 1995; Rudman 1998).

the opposing party (Iyengar et al. 2012) and often preferences for co-partisans extend beyond shared policy preferences (Jessee 2009). Given the importance of partisanship, evaluations of legislators who do or do not compromise may be driven primarily by the party of the legislator. As recent work has shown, people may be critical of members of the opposing party who do not compromise (Paris 2014; Wolack 2010) but more forgiving of members of their own party who do not compromise (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011). This work suggests that partisanship plays a key conditioning role in how people respond to legislative compromise: partisan alignment between an individual and a legislator can make him more forgiving of a legislator from his own party who refuses to compromise, but leaves him more critical of opposing party legislators who do not compromise. That is, the alignment of party may act as a cushion in the evaluations of co-partisans who opt not to compromise.

The importance of partisanship has also been observed in studies that focus on the role of gender (Dolan 2014a; Dolan 2014b; Hayes 2011). Indeed, Dolan (2014a; 2014b) argues that partisanship can often take precedence over the role of gender. Voters, Dolan (2014a; 2014b) shows, focus on whether a politician's party aligns with their own more than they focus on the politician's gender. Taken together, these arguments about the role of partisanship in responses to compromise and the relationship between partisanship and gender suggest that even if a legislator's gender does condition compromise, it should do so only within the confines of partisanship. In other words, we should not expect to observe that people treat female legislators of their own party who do not compromise in the same way that they treat male legislators of the other party who do not compromise. Rather, gender differences may be seen in the comparison of evaluations of male legislators in the same and different party as the public, and the evaluations of female legislators in the same and different party of the public.

### *Role of Issue*

People often associate female politicians with “women’s issues” such as education, childcare, health care, or other social welfare issues (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Dolan 2014b). Indeed, as Swers (2002, 2013) shows, one of the greatest gender differences in legislative behavior stems from the fact that female legislators are consistently more likely than male legislators to pursue and push legislation on women’s issues. This line of reasoning suggests a gendered component to issue ownership (see Petrocik 1996 on partisan issue ownership) where women’s issues such as childcare, education and health-care may be perceived as “female-owned” issues, and issues such as national security and energy may be perceived as “male-owned” issues (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Herrnson et al. 2003). Since legislators are often perceived to be most capable on owned issues, female legislators may appear most qualified to make decisions on female-owned issues, but may be perceived as ill equipped to handle male-owned issues (Swers 2007). Indeed, research suggests that female politicians are particularly likely to benefit when elections focus on women’s issues (Dolan 2004; Wilcox 1994). This line of reasoning, then, suggests that we may expect to observe different responses to female legislators who do not compromise on a female-owned issue than to female legislators who do not compromise on a male-owned issue.

### *Gender, Party and Issue*

Media coverage, politician statements and scholarly research point to the idea that female legislators are more likely to compromise. This may lead people to expect that female legislators should be more compromising than male legislators. This expectation may be consequential, leading people to form disproportionately negative evaluations of female legislators who fail to compromise, and in turn creating stronger incentives for female legislators to engage in

compromise. To explore the implications of the conventional wisdom for how the public evaluates legislators, we put the relationship between gender and compromise to an empirical test.

Although we do not dispute that legislator gender may play a role in the way people evaluate legislators who fail to compromise (relative to those who do compromise), we emphasize that the effect of gender is much more conditional than the conventional wisdom may suggest. Integrating research on gender with research on perceptions of compromise, partisanship and issue content, we suggest that the effect of gender is constrained by partisanship and issue content.

First, we expect that people will evaluate a failure to compromise by legislators of the opposing party differently than a failure to compromise by legislators of their own party. In particular, we expect to see more variation in the way that people treat male and female legislators of their own party than of the opposing party. People may generally dislike members of the opposing party (Iyengar et al 2012), leaving little room for gender to alter public reactions. In contrast, people may be more forgiving of the choices made by legislators of their own party, cushioning them from punishment even when they do not compromise (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011). In turn, however, this cushion may depend on gender and the issue at stake. People may view female legislators as better equipped to handle female-owned issues and male legislators as more competent at handling male-owned issues. Bringing partisanship, gender, and issue together, we expect to observe that female legislators may have strongest cushion when they are of the same party as the voter and do not compromise on a female-owned issue. In contrast, the same-party cushion may be weaker when a female legislator does not compromise on a male-owned issue. We expect to observe a similar pattern for male legislators. A male legislator of the

same party as the voter will receive a stronger cushion when they do not compromise on a male-owned issue, but a weaker one when they do not compromise on a female-owned issue.

## **Design**

Building on a growing body of work that utilizes experiments to understand the electoral incentives of members of Congress (e.g., Carson et al. 2010; Harbridge and Malhotra 2011; Doherty 2013; Harbridge et al. 2014), we test our predictions using two survey experiments. The experiments manipulated legislator gender, compromise behavior, and partisanship relative to the subject. The high level of control afforded by an experimental design allows us to precisely measure how legislators who do not compromise are evaluated, but more importantly, the conditions under which gender can affect these evaluations.

In both experiments we presented subjects with a newspaper article reporting that Congress was preparing to vote on a critical piece of legislation, and for this legislation to pass Democrats and Republicans had to compromise. The articles pointed to the idea that legislative gridlock was the likely outcome if a compromise version was not passed. The only difference between the studies was that in the first experiment our treatment focused on a bill that dealt with energy policy; in the second experiment it focused on early childhood education.

We selected energy policy and early childhood education because these are issues with clear “gender ownership,” and are issues on which the parties may reasonably compromise. First, energy is more of a male-owned issue, while early childhood education is a female-owned issue (Swers 2002, 2007; Winter 2005).<sup>8</sup> Second, it is possible for the two parties to form a

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<sup>8</sup> We also conducted pre-tests to establish the gender-ownership of a given issue.

compromise on both of these issues.<sup>9</sup> The potential for compromise is important, as presenting our participants with a scenario in which members of each party compromised on issues that are central to the party platforms and notable for partisan differences would limit the external validity of this study because such a compromise would be unlikely in modern politics.

In both studies, participants were told that a member of Congress, who was either a man or a woman, was either willing or unwilling to support a compromise bill that would ensure action on this issue. All articles included a photograph of the legislator in question to further prime gender. Rather than focus on comparisons to a control condition without any information about the legislator's vote, we follow previous experimental approaches to evaluating legislative behavior (e.g. Harbridge and Malhotra 2011) and focus on the more politically relevant comparison between the conditions where the legislator compromised and where they were unwilling to compromise.<sup>10</sup> While legislators can occasionally abstain from a vote, over the

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<sup>9</sup> Both parties make efforts to pursue these legislative issues, and both issues have received bipartisan support in recent years. Energy policy in particular has ambiguous partisan issue ownership, and recent reforms like the Energy Savings and Industrial Competitiveness Act of 2013 have garnered bipartisan support in Congress (e.g., the bill had 9 Republican and 8 Democratic cosponsors and was reported from committee on a bipartisan voice vote). Although education policy falls under Democratic issue ownership (Egan 2013; Petrocik 1996; Petrocik et al. 2003), both parties have championed initiatives on early childhood education in recent years and reforms often garner bipartisan support. For instance, the 2007 reauthorization of Head Start (Public Law 110-134) passed with 227 Democrats and 154 Republicans voting yea.

<sup>10</sup> As suggested by Gaines, Kuklinski, and Quirk (2007), a control condition is not necessary since we are interested in testing the comparative static that refusing to compromise decreases

course of a Congress, all legislators develop a record of either being willing to forge bipartisan compromises or of sticking to their party's positions. As a result, the important comparison is between the evaluations of legislators who compromise and those who stand firm. For each issue area, these comparisons are captured by a 2x2x2 experimental design, manipulating relative partisanship (same versus different), gender, and compromise or no compromise. The experimental stimuli are presented in Web Appendix 1.

In total, each study had 8 groups, which are described in Table 1. All groups assigned to a female legislator saw an identical photograph of a woman; all groups assigned to a male legislator saw an identical photograph of a man. In all conditions, the legislator had the last name Bailey; in conditions in which Bailey was a woman her name was Karen, when Bailey was a man his name was Kevin. All names were pre-tested to ensure that they did not prime any associations to existing political figures, and all photographs were pre-tested to be equivalent in attractiveness and perceived competence. In order to pool together Democratic and Republican participants, we re-coded the conditions as women/men in one's same party or in the different party.<sup>11</sup> After exposure to the experimental manipulation, we asked participants a series of questions that measured their evaluations of the legislators.<sup>12</sup>

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evaluations of legislators, and are not interested in whether the compromise or non-compromise condition is driving the effect. Moreover, in the absence of additional information in a full control condition, individuals may form their own conclusions about the behavior of members, potentially inferring from recent news coverage that legislators would not compromise.

<sup>11</sup> This approach required that we drop participants who did not identify with any party.

Originally 28.6% of participants in Study 1 and 26.9% of participants in Study 2 reported they were "pure" Independents on the first screen (meaning they did not lean toward a party). Those

[Table 1 About Here]

Participants in both studies were recruited nationally through Survey Sample International (SSI). The first study was fielded in January 2014 and the second was fielded in August 2014. SSI has been used frequently in political science experimental research studies (see Berinsky et al. 2014; Bullock 2011; Kam 2012; Malhotra and Margalit 2010; Malhotra et al. 2013). As Berinsky et al. (2014) note, SSI is particularly effective at recruiting hard to reach participants, resulting in a diverse national sample. We compare our sample to the American National Election Study in Table 2, finding slight differences in gender, education, and income. Within our study, randomization checks show that demographic groups do not predict treatment assignment (see Web Appendix 2).

[Table 2 About Here]

To consider whether individuals respond differently to legislators who are unwilling to compromise when they are male or female we consider individual perceptions of the legislators through three dependent variables that tap into different dimensions on which people judge political figures. First, we measured favorability, using a measure that allows people to rank Representative Bailey from “Extremely Unfavorable” to “Extremely Favorable” on a seven-point scale. Second, we measured whether people perceive that Bailey is a good representative, asking how well the statement “Bailey is a good representative of constituent opinions” describes the

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who stated they were pure Independents were then asked to select the partisan category that is most like them on the next screen. Among the people sent to the next screen, all but 4 of the participants in Study 1 and all participants in Study 2 selected a partisan category. Partisan assignment for these Independents was based on this second selection screen.

<sup>12</sup> All questions and treatments were also pre-tested prior to fielding.

legislator. Response options ranged from “Describes Bailey very well” to “Describes Bailey very poorly” on a six-option scale. The third measure asked respondents to evaluate Bailey more broadly and consider whether he/she would move up in leadership positions. We asked “Do you believe Bailey is likely to move up to leadership positions in Congress?” Response options ranged from “Highly likely” to “Highly unlikely” on a five-point scale. All dependent variables were recoded to range between 0 and 1, with 1 representing the highest agreement with the statement/question.

## Results

Fully analyzing the relationship between gender, partisanship, issue and compromise requires making a number of different comparisons. First, we track the effect of not compromising by comparing the way participants evaluate the legislator in the compromise conditions and the way participants evaluate the legislator in the no compromise conditions. This provides an intuitive and politically meaningful comparison. If a piece of legislation requires bipartisan compromise to move forward, the two likely options for a legislator would be to either compromise or stand firm. As a result, a direct comparison of the two allows us to consider how individual evaluations differ depending on which option a legislator takes.<sup>13</sup> For ease of discussion, we term this difference between the evaluation of the same legislator when he/she compromises and when he/she does not compromise the *cost of not compromising*.

We then use two different approaches to consider the role of gender. We start by comparing the cost of not compromising across gender but within partisanship. That is, we look

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<sup>13</sup> In the tables we present differences in evaluations between legislators who do and do not compromise, along with the difference-in-differences for each gender or party. Mean evaluations for each condition and each dependent variable are included in Web Appendix 3.

at the cost of not compromising for the female legislator compared to the cost of not compromising for male legislator when both are of the same party as the participant, or when both are from a different party as the participant. For each dependent variable, we first assess the cost of not compromising and then make the following comparison:

(1) Cost of Not Compromising, Male<sub>Same PID</sub> – Cost of Not Compromising, Female<sub>Same PID</sub>

(2) Cost of Not Compromising, Male<sub>Different PID</sub> – Cost of Not Compromising, Female<sub>Different PID</sub>

These comparisons allow us to consider whether – accounting for partisanship – the cost of not compromising varies by the gender of the legislator. While conventional wisdom would suggest that all female legislators will be judged more harshly for not compromising, our approach allows us to capture whether any gender effects vary for own and opposing party legislators.

Next, we conduct a second analysis and consider the cost of not compromising across partisanship but *within* gender. Here we make the following comparisons, again leveraging the difference between the compromise and no compromise conditions for each legislator:

(3) Cost of Not Compromising, Female<sub>Same PID</sub> – Cost of Not Compromising, Female<sub>DifferentPID</sub>

(4) Cost of Not Compromising, Male<sub>Same PID</sub> – Cost of Not Compromising Male<sub>Different PID</sub>

If male and female legislators are judged similarly, both should experience more negative evaluations when they are from the opposing party and a cushion in support when they are from the same party. In contrast, if gender is the more dominant factor, female legislators who do not compromise may not receive as much of a cushion from same party status as their male counterparts.

We conduct the same sets of analyses for both energy policy (Study 1) and early childhood education (Study 2). This will allow us to consider whether the patterns in results

vary by the issue at stake. In particular, we will consider whether gender plays more or less of a role when the legislation concerns a female-owned issue (early childhood education policy) relative to a male-owned issue (energy policy).

#### *Within Party, Across Gender Comparisons*

The first approach to analyzing the patterns of evaluations leverages differences within parties and across gender. In Table 3 we present first the cost of not compromising (the difference between evaluations of the same legislator in the compromise and no compromise conditions). All outcome variables are coded 0 to 1. A positive value means that legislators paid a cost for not compromising and were evaluated more positively when they compromised than when they did not compromise. We then present the differences across gender by comparing the costs female and male legislators pay for not compromising. We present both types of results across three different outcome measures: general favorability toward the legislator, perception that the legislator is a good representative, and perception that the legislator would move up in the leadership.

We first turn to energy policy (Study 1; top half of Table 3). First, as previous scholarship suggests, there is a robust finding that people are more favorably disposed to politicians who compromise than those who do not compromise. Indeed, across all three outcome measures we see positive values for the cost of not compromising, suggesting that regardless of gender or party, legislators are evaluated more positively when they compromise than when they fail to do so. This result is likely due to the perception that the alternative to compromise in this case is legislative gridlock.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> At the end of the survey, we asked participants “if members do not compromise on energy legislation, which of the following is most likely to happen?” Response options were “Democrats

We next consider the role of gender more closely and compare the cost of not compromising within each party (same and different) for male and female legislators. In this comparison, positive values mean that female legislators pay a higher cost for not compromising while negative values point to male legislators being judged more harshly. These comparisons show some evidence that within party evaluations of female legislators are more sensitive to the effect of not compromising than within party evaluations of male legislators, but this first set of results suggests that gender plays a more critical role for legislators of the participant's *own party* than for the legislators of the opposing party (Table 3, row labeled Difference-in-Difference).

Focusing on the favorability rating, for example, the cost of not compromising for a female legislator of the participant's own party is 0.12, meaning that the legislator is perceived more favorably when she compromises than when she does not. A male legislator of the participant's own party, however pays a lower cost for not compromising (0.063). Although the male legislator is also evaluated more positively when he compromises than when he does not, the overall cost of not compromising is significantly less for the male legislator than for the female legislator. That is, the difference-in-difference measure of 0.054 is statistically significant ( $p < 0.1$ ). We observe a similar pattern on the leadership measure where again the cost of not compromising is significantly larger among women than among men of the participant's own party. This pattern offers some support for the conventional wisdom that gender affects

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pass own version of the legislation,” “Republicans pass own version of the legislation,” and “Gridlock over the legislation and nothing passes.” 65% of participants in Study 1, and 62% of participants in Study 2 thought that gridlock would result.

evaluations of legislators and that female legislators have more electoral incentives to compromise.

Gender plays a smaller role in evaluation of legislators of the opposing party. On the “good representative” and leadership measures, we observe no gender differences in the costs opposing party lawmakers pay for not compromising. On the leadership measure, for example, the cost of not compromising for a female legislator of the opposing party (0.098) is similar to the cost of not compromising for a male legislator of the opposing party (0.13). Moreover, contrary to the expectation that women would be judged more harshly, we observe that the out-party male is at times judged more harshly than the out-party woman (e.g., on the favorability rating). In sum, while these patterns point to some gender differences in evaluations, they suggest that when it comes to a male-owned issue such as energy policy, gender expectations are more likely to affect co-partisans than women from the opposing party.

[Table 3 About Here]

We next turn to compromise on the female-owned issue of early childhood education (Study 2, bottom half of Table 3). Much as in Study 1, we again observe all positive values on the cost of not compromising, showing that again there is a robust finding that people are more favorably disposed to politicians who compromise than those who do not compromise.

The patterns of evaluations for female and male legislators on the female-owned issue, however, differ from those of the male-owned energy issue. We find that on early childhood education, legislator gender pushes the costs of not compromising in a direction opposite from expectations based on gender stereotypes about compromise. Whereas conventional wisdom suggests that female legislators should pay higher costs for not compromising, we find that on this female-owned issue *men* are more likely to pay a higher cost for not compromising. Among

legislators of the participants' own party, the cost of not compromising is significantly higher for male legislators than female legislators across all three outcome measures. Turning to the favorability rating, for example, a female legislator of the participant's own party pays a cost of 0.052 for not compromising on early childhood education. A male legislator of the participant's own party, however, pays a cost of 0.12 – a significantly higher cost compared to that of the female legislator. This pattern runs counter to the conventional wisdom, and differs from the results of the first study where the co-partisan woman paid higher costs for not compromising. However, it is consistent with our argument about the conditional nature of gender. Turning to legislators of the opposing party, in only one of the our three measures do we see any evidence that female legislators pay a higher cost for not compromising, suggesting that there is little evidence to support the belief that female lawmakers are judged more harshly for not compromising on female-owned issues.

Overall, this set of results points to several distinct patterns. First, the costs of not compromising depend on the partisanship of the legislators. Second, the role of gender may depend on the type of issue being considered. On male-owned issues, co-partisan female legislators face larger costs for not compromising. On female-owned issues, expectations that female legislators are best at addressing the issue may insulate these legislators from the costs of not compromising.

#### *Within Gender, Across Party Comparisons*

Next, we compare evaluations of legislators *within* gender and across parties. This approach allows us to assess whether opposing party legislators bear the brunt of negative evaluations for not compromising, while same party legislators receive a cushion, and whether these patterns are the same for female and male legislators. We present our results in Table 4,

which, much like Table 3, presents the cost of not compromising, but compares these costs across party but *within* gender. Beginning again with energy policy (Study 1), we find that *within* gender, the effects of party are stronger among men than among women. Across all three outcome measures, the cost of not compromising is significantly larger for men in the other party than for men of the participants' own party. Focusing on favorability ratings, for example, we see that the cost of not compromising for male legislators of the participant's own party is 0.063, while the cost of not compromising for male legislators of the opposing party is 0.18. The difference between these two costs, -0.12, is statistically significant, and suggests that male legislators of the opposing party pay a higher cost for not compromising.

Among female legislators, however, party is much less important. In none of the three outcome measures is the effect of not compromising larger for women in the other party than for women of one's own party. On the favorability rating, for instance, a female legislator of the participant's own party pays a cost of 0.12 for not compromising, while a female legislator of the opposing party pays a cost of 0.13 for not compromising. The difference between these two costs is small (-0.012) and does not reach statistical significance. That is, the co-partisan female legislator is treated much like a member of the other party in her evaluations: she does not receive an in-party cushion when she does not compromise. These patterns suggest that when it comes to a male-owned issue, female and male legislators are evaluated differently. When facing co-partisans in the public, female legislators have greater incentives to compromise than their male counterparts.

[Table 4 About Here]

Turning next to the issue of early childhood education (Study 2), we find that these patterns again largely reverse. On a female-owned issue, partisanship affects the costs of not

compromising for female legislators, but has smaller effects among male legislators. Across all three measures of legislator evaluation the cost of not compromising is significantly larger for women of the opposing party than for women of one's own party. These negative effects for the opposing party woman suggest that the combination of being of the opposite party and not compromising on a female-owned issue may both factor into the evaluations. In contrast, on a female-owned issue, when a woman's partisanship aligns with potential voters, her evaluations are cushioned by partisanship. Among male legislators, opposing party members are judged more harshly than own party members on only the favorability ratings. On the other two variables, evaluations are similar between in-party and out-party men. These patterns suggest that co-partisan men may face greater incentives to compromise on a female-owned issue like early childhood education.

### *Results Summary*

In sum, these patterns suggest that the relationship between gender and the costs of not compromising are conditional. When it comes to compromise, we show that partisanship and issue both factor in to the way people evaluate female legislators. On a male-owned issue, the effect of not compromising is significantly larger for co-partisan women than for co-partisan men. These results suggest that same-party status provides more insulation for male legislators who do not compromise than for female legislators who do not compromise. On a female-owned issue, however, this pattern reverses. It is co-partisan male legislators who do not receive a cushion when they fail to compromise, while female legislators are more insulated by their partisan ties.

### **Conclusions**

Among the general election public, legislative compromise is generally perceived as beneficial. To this end, political commentators often suggest that Congress as a whole may be more bipartisan and reach more legislative compromises if there were more women in the legislature. Legislator behavior and gender stereotypes align with this view. In this manuscript we reconsider these arguments about gender. We analyze whether breaking with expectations of compromise holds any consequences for the evaluations of legislators in general, and female legislators in particular. Tracking the extent to which individual reactions to legislators who did not compromise hinge on the lawmaker's gender, we show that female legislators do face more incentives to compromise, but only under certain conditions.

Our findings show that – contrary to what media coverage may suggest – female legislators do not consistently face a backlash for failing to meet the expectation of the “compromising woman”. First, the extent to which legislators pay a cost for not compromising is conditional on partisanship. Partisanship can insulate legislators from the increased costs of not compromising, but partisanship can offer different cushions for male and female legislators. Second, the issue area at hand can affect evaluations. Although female legislators do face more negative reactions when they do not compromise on male-owned issues, male legislators face more negative reactions when they fail to compromise on female-owned issues.

Party and issue also matter jointly. On energy policy – a male-owned issue – male legislators from the opposing party pay the higher costs of not compromising than co-partisan males. Meanwhile, female legislators from the individual's own party are judged no differently than opposing party females. In contrast, on the female-owned issue of early childhood education males of both parties are judged similarly and female legislators of the opposing party and judged more harshly than female legislators of one's own party. In other words, we find that a

combination of partisanship and issue provides the strongest insulation against the costs of not compromising. The effects of gender are not only limited, but also do not consistently work against female legislators.

In sum, the implications of these findings for legislative behavior by male and female members of Congress hinge on the partisanship of the member and the type of issue being considered. Under the assumption that members of Congress are constrained by their electoral incentives (Mayhew 1974), preferences for compromise among constituents may incentivize members to break from the party line. As legislators increasingly represent districts where voter partisanship aligns with the members' partisanship, legislators are likely to respond to the incentives from co-partisans in the public. On male-owned issues, partisanship cushions evaluations, suggesting that male legislators facing their own partisans in the public have relatively weak incentives to compromise. Female legislators facing similar conditions have greater incentives to compromise. Although the reverse is true on female-owned issues, to the extent that the congressional agenda is dominated by traditionally male-owned issues, female legislators may have more incentives to compromise.

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Table 1: Experimental Conditions (Study 1: N=841; Study 2: N=799)	
<b>Same PID</b>	<b>Different PID</b>
Group 1: Woman, compromises (Study 1, n=110, Study 2 n=98)	Group 5: Woman, compromises (Study 1 n=104, Study 2 n=102)
Group 2: Woman, does not compromise (Study 1 n=106, Study 2 n=99)	Group 6: Woman, does not compromise (Study 1 n=99, Study 2 n=100)
Group 3: Man, compromises (Study 1 n=102, Study 2 n=100)	Group 7: Man, compromises (Study 1 n=110, Study 2 n=100)
Group 4: Man, does not compromise (Study 1 n=106, Study 2 n=101)	Group 8: Man, does not compromise (Study 1 n=104, Study 2 n=99)

Table 2: Comparison of our Sample to the ANES 2012 Sample			
	Study 1 Sample	Study 2 Sample	ANES 2012
% Male	41.16%	46%	47.93%
% BA+	38.86%	42.49%	31.16%
% \$50,000+ income	51.13%	44.84%	43.91%
Mean ideology (1, extremely liberal, 7 extremely conservative)	4.01	3.73	4.15

Table 3: Within Party, Across Gender Comparisons  
**Study 1: Energy**

	<i>Cost of Not Compromising</i>					
	<i>Favorability</i>		<i>Good Representative</i>		<i>Leadership</i>	
	Same PID	Different PID	Same PID	Different PID	Same PID	Different PID
Woman	0.12***	0.13***	.071***	.070**	0.13***	0.098**
Man	0.063**	0.18***	0.048*	.10***	0.040	0.13***
Difference-in Differences	0.054*	-0.05*	.023	-.03	.086**	-.033

**Study 2: Early Childhood Education**

	<i>Cost of Not Compromising</i>					
	<i>Favorability</i>		<i>Good Representative</i>		<i>Leadership</i>	
	Same PID	Different PID	Same PID	Different PID	Same PID	Different PID
Woman	0.052	0.18***	0.071**	0.18***	0.059*	0.10***
Man	0.12***	0.17***	0.15***	0.12***	0.11***	0.12***
Difference-in Differences	-0.068***	0.0090	-0.079***	0.053**	-0.051**	-0.023

\* p<0.1, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01. All tests of significant are two-tailed. All effects are the average evaluation in the compromise condition minus the no compromise condition. Positive numbers: member was judged more favorably in the compromise condition

Table 4: Within Gender, Across Party Comparisons  
**Study 1 (Energy)**

	<i>Cost of Not Compromising</i>					
	<i>Favorability</i>		<i>Good Representative</i>		<i>Leadership</i>	
	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man
Same PID	0.12***	0.063**	.071***	0.048*	0.13***	0.040
Different PID	0.13***	0.18***	.070**	.10***	0.098**	0.13***
Difference-in Differences	-0.012	-0.12***	.0011	-.054***	.028	-.091***

**Study 2: Early Childhood Education**

	<i>Cost of Not Compromising</i>					
	<i>Favorability</i>		<i>Good Representative</i>		<i>Leadership</i>	
	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man
Same PID	0.052	0.12***	0.071**	0.15***	0.059*	0.11***
Different PID	0.18***	0.17***	0.18***	0.12***	0.10***	0.12***
Difference-in Differences	-0.12***	-0.044*	-0.10***	0.022	-0.041*	-0.013

\* p<0.1, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01. All tests of significant are two-tailed. All effects are the average evaluation in the compromise condition minus the no compromise condition. Positive numbers: member was judged more favorably in the compromise condition

## **Web Appendix 1: Experimental Treatments**

### **Compromise treatment:**

In this term, Congress faces a critical crossroads in regard to [energy/early childhood education]. With the deadline for a vote swiftly approaching, Congress must determine the future of [energy policy/early childhood education] in America.

A number of non-partisan organizations have urged Congress to reach a compromise on this issue. Time, however, is running short.

In order for this critical bill to pass, legislators on both sides of the aisle will have to put aside their differences and reach a compromise. Nonetheless, while many in Congress are still debating their positions, some members of both the Democratic and Republican parties have already expressed a willingness to compromise, and each party already has its own stalwarts.

One of those willing to compromise is [Party, Gender]. Bailey has already stated publically that [he/she] is willing to compromise and will vote for the bill. Although the vote is still a week away, Bailey has told numerous media sources that [he/she] will not change [his/her] vote.

“This is an issue on which I am willing to compromise,” Bailey said. “My voters knew this when they elected me.”

Bailey’s staff reports that [he/she] will be present to cast a vote on this bill.

### **Non-Compromise treatment:**

In this term, Congress faces a critical crossroads in regard to [energy/early childhood education]. With the deadline for a vote swiftly approaching, Congress must determine the future of [energy/early childhood education policy] in America.

A number of non-partisan organizations have urged Congress to reach a compromise on this issue. Time, however, is running short.

In order for this critical bill to pass, legislators on both sides of the aisle will have to put aside their differences and reach a compromise. Nonetheless, while many in Congress are still debating their positions, some members of both the Democratic and Republican parties have already expressed a willingness to compromise, and each party already has its own stalwarts.

One of those willing to compromise is [Party, Gender]. Bailey has already stated publically that [he/she] is willing to compromise and will vote for the bill. Although the vote is still a week away, Bailey has told numerous media sources that [he/she] will not change [his/her] vote.

“This is simply not an issue on which I am willing to compromise,” Bailey said. “My voters knew this when they elected me.”

Bailey’s staff reports that [he/she] will be present to cast a vote on this bill.

## Web Appendix 2: Group Randomization

Demographic factors do not affect group assignment:

Group assignment predicted by demographic factors (ordered probit)		
	Study 1	Study 2
Gender	-0.003 (0.006)	-0.005 (0.006)
Education	-0.005 (0.005)	0.001 (0.005)
Age	0.004 (0.009)	-0.004 (0.018)
News Consumption	-0.001 (0.012)	0.002 (0.004)
Ideology	-0.003 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.007)
Income	0.003 (0.006)	-0.005 (0.004)
$\chi^2$	4.08	4.79

**Web Appendix 3: Group Means**

<i>Study 1: Energy</i>						
	<i>Mean (SD)</i>					
	<i>Favorability</i>		<i>Good Representative</i>		<i>Leadership</i>	
	Same PID	Different PID	Same PID	Different PID	Same PID	Different PID
Woman, Compromise	0.638 (0.194)	0.598 (0.205)	0.746 (0.166)	0.725 (0.183)	0.625 (0.217)	0.614 (0.259)
Women, Does Not Compromise	0.521 (0.210)	0.469 (0.289)	0.675 (0.199)	0.654 (0.237)	0.500 (0.246)	0.516 (0.294)
<i>Cost of Not Compromising</i>	<b>0.12***</b>	<b>0.13***</b>	<b>.071***</b>	<b>.070**</b>	<b>0.13***</b>	<b>0.098**</b>
Man, Compromise	0.599 (0.187)	0.589 (0.216)	0.718 (0.167)	0.738 (0.176)	0.600 (0.213)	0.619 (0.222)
Man, Does Not Compromise	0.536 (0.217)	0.411 (0.267)	0.669 (0.203)	0.636 (0.238)	0.560 (0.256)	0.488 (0.281)
<i>Cost of Not Compromising</i>	<b>0.063**</b>	<b>0.18***</b>	<b>0.048*</b>	<b>.10***</b>	<b>0.040</b>	<b>0.13***</b>
<i>Study 2: Early Childhood Education</i>						
	<i>Mean (SD)</i>					
	<i>Favorability</i>		<i>Good Representative</i>		<i>Leadership</i>	
	Same PID	Different PID	Same PID	Different PID	Same PID	Different PID
Woman, Compromise	0.604 (0.220)	0.618 (0.194)	0.673 (0.209)	0.663 (0.199)	0.612 (0.207)	0.605 (0.198)
Women, Does Not Compromise	0.552 (0.229)	0.443 (0.261)	0.602 (0.238)	0.488 (0.292)	0.553 (0.261)	0.505 (0.291)
<i>Cost of Not Compromising</i>	<b>0.052</b>	<b>0.18***</b>	<b>0.071**</b>	<b>0.18***</b>	<b>0.059*</b>	<b>0.10***</b>

Man, Compromise	0.612 (0.205)	0.598 (0.236)	0.664 (0.190)	0.638 (0.210)	0.628 (0.229)	0.62 (0.220)
Man, Does Not Compromise	0.490 (0.231)	0.432 (0.267)	0.519 (0.267)	0.515 (0.274)	0.518 (0.262)	0.497 (0.251)
<b><i>Cost of Not Compromising</i></b>	<b><i>0.12***</i></b>	<b><i>0.17***</i></b>	<b><i>0.15***</i></b>	<b><i>0.12***</i></b>	<b><i>0.11***</i></b>	<b><i>0.12***</i></b>